

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
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R 161330Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9897
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HIEGHT CZ

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, BL, PINT
SUBJECT: TWENTY-FOUR HOUR STRIKE IN COCHABAMBA

1. IN RESPONSE TO A BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT DECISION NOT TO APPROVE A BUDGET OF 143,000,000 (\$7,079,208) FOR COCHABABA'S SAN SIMON UNIVERSITY, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CITY DECLARED A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE ON MARCH 15. IF NO AGREEMENT IS REACHED WITHIN THE 24-HOUR PERIOD, COMMUNITY SPOKESMEN HAVE SAID THE STRIKE WILL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY.

2. THE UNIVERSITY'S BUDGETARY DEMANDS WERE SUBMITTED NEARLY A MONTH AGO. DURING THE PAST THREE WEEKS, IT STUDENTS AND FACULTY HAVE BEEN ON STRIKE, AND RESENTMENT OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S STANCE HAS BUILT UP AND SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE CITY. IN AN EFFORT TO AVERT THE GENERAL STRIKE, INTERIOR MINISTER GUILLERMO JIMENEZ GALLO AND FINANCE MINISTER DAVID BLANCO TRAVELLED TO COCHABAMBA ON MARCH 14 AND MET WITH UNIVERSITY AND CIVIC LEADERS. THE OFFERED TO APPROVE A BUDGET OF 122,900,00 PESOS (\$6,084,158), WHICH WOULD
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REPRESENT 83 PERCENT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S DEMANDS. AFTER FOUR HOURS OF NEGOTIATIONS, HOWEVER, THEIR OFFER WAS REJECTED AND THE 24-HOUR STRIKE WAS DECLARED.

3. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE TALKS BROKE OFF, JIMENEZ COMMENTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT APPROVE THE 143,000,000 FIGURE BECAUSE OF SUCH FACTORS AS THE HIGH COST OF THE DEMO-

CRATIZATION PROCESS AND DISRUPTIONS IN THE MINES CAUSED BY STRIKES AND SABOTAGE. BLANCO ADDED THAT RECENT INCREASES IN THE PENSION OF CHACO WAR VETERANS AND IN JUDICIAL SECTOR SALARIES ALSO HAVE LIMITED THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC FLEXIBILITY.

4. EMBASSY HAS BEEN UNABLE TO CONTACT CONSULAR AGENT IN COCHABAMBA FOR FURTHER INFORMATION BECAUSE TELEPHONE WORKERS ARE ALSO APPARENTLY TAKING PART IN THE STRIKE.

5. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT IS CAUGHT IN A FINANCIAL BIND WHICH IS CERTAIN TO GET TIGHTER AS MORE AND MORE INTEREST GROUPS BEGIN TO PRESSURE FOR WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO BE THEIR JUST ENTITLEMENTS. THE EFFORTS OF JIMENEZ AND BLANCO TO ATTRIBUTE THE GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF ECONOMIC FLEXIBILITY TO PROBLEMS OR DEMANDS IN OTHER SECTORS WILL NOT BE PERSUASIVE TO THE PEOPLE OF COCHABAMBA, BUT THEY DO FAIRLY ILLUSTRATE THE GOVERNMENT'S PREDICAMENT. WHILE IT IS RISKY TO PREDICT HOW THE COCHABAMBA STRIKE WILL END, IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT SUCH REGIONAL PROTESTS ARE NOT UNUSUAL (ONE OCCURRED RECENTLY IN THE POTOSI AREA OVER DEVELOPMENTAL PRIORITIES) AND SO FAR HAVE BEEN RESOLVED PEACEFULLY.
BOEKER

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